

XIV.—*Notes on the Nest and Eggs of Stenostira scita* (Vieill.). By H. W. JAMES.

I HAVE not met with any other collector in South Africa who has found the nest and eggs of the Fairy Flycatcher; neither, so far as I am aware, have the nest and eggs ever been described.

The nest is a rare one, not on account of the rarity of the bird, but from the careful and clever way in which it is concealed. In the Cradock and Tarkastad districts of Cape Colony this beautiful little bird is by no means rare. Its favourite haunt is the scrub on the banks of the Fish, Tarka, and Vlekpoort rivers. I have lived and collected along those rivers for the last fifteen years, and, although I have always been on the look-out for nests of this species, I only succeeded in finding six in that time. Unless one sees the bird carrying nesting material, the chances of finding a nest are very small.

My first nest I found quite by accident. Mousebirds, *Colius colius* (Linn.) and *Colius indicus* (Lath.), had been taking such heavy toll of my fruit that I decided to lessen their numbers, and at the same time provide food for a pair of tame Kestrels. The first Mousebird I shot fell into the centre of a thick "wolvedoorn" hedge. The only way to retrieve it was by lying flat down and wriggling my way in towards the centre of the hedge—the "wolvedoorn" is a prickly, dense-growing shrub, making this no easy matter. On reaching the centre of the bush I was able to kneel up, and, to my surprise and, I may add, pleasure, found, a few inches from my face, a nest of *Stenostira scita*, cleverly hidden amongst the dead overhanging branches and containing two eggs.

I crept out again and tried to locate the nest from outside, but although I knew exactly where it was I failed to see it.

All the time I was near the nest the little owners kept up an incessant chattering, and often came within a few inches of my head.

I found two more nests in subsequent years in the same

hedge, both equally as well hidden as the first, and only found by laboriously investigating every inch of the hedge.

The other three nests were found by following birds carrying nesting material. One was placed in a gannabosch. This bush grows to an average height of six feet. The one in which the nest was built had a stem about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. Nine inches from the ground three minor stems sprung from the main stem forming a deep and perfect fork. The nest was placed in this fork, and so cunningly concealed that it was quite impossible to see it even when only a foot or so away. This nest contained three eggs—the only one I have ever found with more than two.

Another nest was built among the debris from the river caught up by a thorn-tree growing on the banks of the Fish River. A high flood had bent the tree—a small one—and thrown against it a mass of debris in such a way as to form under it a sheltered hollow, shaped like a Kaffir hut. The nest was placed right inside this hollow, and well concealed among the debris, about three feet from the ground.

The last nest I found was in a thorn-tree. The lower branches had died and dropped down, forming a dense mass round the trunk. I found the nest after forcing my way in. It was deep in near the trunk, and cleverly concealed between two thickish branches. It took me some time to find it. I must have looked at the actual spot several times before I detected the nest. It was nearly completed when I found it, but the birds did not desert it, and ten days later I found it contained two eggs.

All the nests were exactly the same. They were built of dead leaves, dead grass and cobwebs, with the interior thickly lined with wool and feathers. The walls were thick and compact, and the whole beautifully and neatly finished; the outside was perfectly round and smooth. In shape they were deep cups, measuring internally $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter and $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches deep. In every instance they harmonised perfectly with their surroundings.

As mentioned above, one nest contained three eggs; the others, two. In shape the eggs are broad ovals, and have a

fair amount of gloss. I have three clutches in my collection, and as they show a good deal of variation I will describe each one.

- (1) Ground-colour, pale greenish-buff; round the broad end of the eggs a very indistinct, almost obsolete, zone of a slightly darker shade of the same colour.
- (2) Ground-colour, pale drab; round the broad end of the eggs a distinct zone of dark-buff.
- (3) Ground-colour, creamy-buff; round the middle of the eggs a broad and very distinct zone consisting of confluent blotches of brown. In this clutch the whole shell is covered with small, almost obsolete, spots of pale greenish-brown.

The measurements of the eggs are in inches, $\cdot 55$ to $\cdot 65$ long by $\cdot 43$ to $\cdot 46$ broad.

All nests were found in the months of October and November.

XV.—*On the Eggs of the Puffin, Fratercula artica.*

By PERCY F. BUNYARD, F.Z.S., M.B.O.U.C.

(Plate II.)

VERY few eggs have been more neglected than those of *Fratercula arctica*.

In most collections they are generally represented by one or two indifferent specimens, selected for their superficial markings. Those which appear to be unmarked are regarded as uninteresting or wholly unworthy of a place in the cabinet.

From a strictly oological point of view these apparently unmarked eggs are most interesting, and on a closer examination many of them will be found to be, not only well-marked, but often heavily pigmented.

To the unaided eye, however, nine-tenths of these markings are invisible, owing to their being very deep-lying. In order to reach this pigment it is necessary to remove, by scraping, the outermost glutinous layer, and also the outer lime layer, before the pigment is reached; *this, as*